

Summary - Faculty Senate Roundtable on University Governance (2/23/02)

The following is a summary of the spring 2002 roundtable. I have attempted to collect thoughts expressed throughout the meeting into logical topics if possible. If the summary still seems disjointed, it is a function of the “free-wheeling” nature of the conversation. If some statements seem contradictory, this too is a function of the variety of opinions expressed. This summary does not constitute a set of conclusions; rather it represents an exploration of ideas.

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GENERAL

The *Principles for University Governance*, hereafter called *Principles*, is a document of collegiality and consultation for all members of the university community. The document applies not only to faculty and administration but also to professional staff and students. It has worked well in most searches for faculty members, department heads, and deans. The response of administrators has been positive generally. Nevertheless some faculty and administrators do not realize how unique and important *Principles* is.

There has been an unintended assumption by some individuals that *Principles* is a document that describes presumed mistrust of the administration rather than representation by the faculty. It was noted that there is much less distrust at MSU than at other institutions without a *Principles* document. A congenial roundtable on university governance would be unheard of at some other institutions. Following the *Principles* can be cumbersome, but not following it can be even more cumbersome. Because there is a tendency to be complacent about governance when times are good, faculty and administrators should strive for consistency at all times.

The purpose of elections is to ensure representation. Occasionally people are elected for the wrong reasons. Examples included electing people who are not interested in serving and manipulating elections to ensure a pre-determined outcome. Questions concerning how the needs of the silent majority are met and how diversity can be maintained were discussed. A convening authority can control representation by adjusting the size of a committee, and thus the number of appointed positions. This is more difficult for small committees.

Most senate cases that involve governance issues are unnecessary and could be remedied up front if a minimal application of *Principles* occurred. This raised questions concerning when people heard about the *Principles* and whether there is a need for an orientation of new faculty and administrators with regards to the *Principles*? Successful application of the *Principles* requires an element of education of both faculty and administrators.

SERVICE

Faculty responsibility in governance was discussed. In general, faculty responsibility is vague. Is there an obligation to serve? Do colleagues support the efforts of the senators? Is there a culture that promotes faculty participation? Some feel that the culture at MSU is to leave governance to administrators. Until this culture changes, some faculty will still want to be just left alone to teach and do their research. If the *Principles* is to be taken seriously the commitment of the faculty and administration must continue.

The status of faculty representation by minorities and women on campus was discussed. Because of low representation in the faculty at large, women and especially minorities are asked to perform an excessive amount of service. It is not clear that this service commitment is appreciated sufficiently and rewarded. In the recent past use of internships has been helpful to help individuals acquire administrative experience.

PROMOTION & TENURE

Promotion and Tenure decisions necessarily have elements of shared governance. Tenure is predicated on the concept of peer review. However not all colleges and departments have P&T committees. Should such committees be required or should units be permitted to vote them out of existence for the year as is presently done? Administrators indicated a preference for at least department promotion and tenure committees. Departments with the most rigorous promotion and tenure procedures receive the greatest national and international recognition. Where structured department and college committees exist, the standards are generally higher. There was a shared opinion that consistent annual review documentation is important to the P&T process as well as during any appeals process.

Even at the university level, Promotion and Tenure seems to be based on excellence in Teaching and Research (sometimes only Research), but not excellence in Service. Individuals should be careful in service commitments since excellent service cannot overcome deficiencies in teaching or research. Scholarly activities are set at the national level, and service is not as marketable as teaching or research.

BUDGETARY POLICY AND PROCEDURES

The *Principles* calls for faculty, staff, and student representation at “university level discussions of resource allocation and budgetary policy and procedures.” This is consistent with SACS requirements. In general there has been a lack of communication between administration and faculty on this issue as noted by the 1992/93 SACS report. A problem is that discussions of resource allocation occur constantly, and practical application of representation in the budget process is difficult. The Executive Council does not engage in much discussion of issues. Faculty representation in budget matters might improve if the Executive Council became a forum for discussion.

ADMINISTRATION PERCEPTION OF *PRINCIPLES FOR UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE*

THE *PRINCIPLES* IS A DOCUMENT OF GUIDANCE, WHICH SHOULD PERMIT FLEXIBILITY AND SHOULD NOT BE OVERLY PRESCRIPTIVE. AN ADVANTAGE IS THAT THERE IS A PRE-AGREED PROCEDURE FOR HIRING FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS, BUT THERE IS ALSO A NEED TO NEGOTIATE CERTAIN UNSPECIFIED SITUATIONS. THE *PRINCIPLES* IS GOOD ON INPUT BUT LIGHT ON OUTPUT. IT CANNOT PRESCRIBE SCHEDULES, AND TIME LINES VARY AND MUST BE ACCOMMODATED. *PRINCIPLES* IS NOT NECESSARILY A CONTENTIOUS DOCUMENT UNLESS IT IS IGNORED. HOWEVER EVERYONE MUST UNDERSTAND ITS INTERPRETATION. THE *PRINCIPLES* SHOULD BE APPLIED IN A SPIRIT OF COLLEGIALLY. NOTHING TAKES THE PLACE OF TRUST, AND THERE HAS BEEN IMPROVED TRUST BETWEEN FACULTY AND THE ADMINISTRATION BECAUSE OF THE *PRINCIPLES*.

There is a need to hold each other (faculty and administrators) accountable, especially where confidentiality must be maintained and discretion is important. Open discussion that is not for public consumption must occur in an environment that does not lead to the generation of rumors.

OTHER TOPICS RELATED TO GOVERNANCE

The need for the faculty at the Meridian Campus to have a greater role in university governance was discussed, including representation on the Robert Holland Faculty Senate and greater participation in their own governance through a Meridian campus council or senate.

The Faculty Senate could be more focused and more pro-active. It is unclear what is(are) the specific path(s) by which policies and practices are changed. Is there a need for a single such path? On the other hand, an open and flexible process might serve the university better than a focused one.

The question of what is meant by “independent executive and budgetary authority” as it applies to unspecified administrators was discussed briefly. Faculty must be involved in setting admission standards for the university. There is no appeals committee for non-tenure track faculty.